



KATAPLASMA KAOLINI, U. S. P., 1900

(5)

To the Editor:—Many things are revived, which already have passed in oblivion, and many things fall, which are now held in honor (Horace).¹ Dr. Herman Schelenz of Cassel, Germany,² has shown positively that earth and clay pastes and poultices have been used intermittently from the very earliest period in the history of medicine. The recent introduction into our pharmaceutical armamentarium of the earth poultices and clay pastes should not be regarded, therefore, in any way as a novelty.

In the course of the past few years, such preparations have been exploited broadcast and with vigor, and many medical journals are filled with almost frantic attempts to convince the profession that these remedies are *sine qua non* in a host of diseases of amazing variety, special preference, however, being shown for diseases ending in "itis." That the labors of these exploits were not wasted soon became evident. Physicians began to prescribe these preparations to an extent far beyond the dreams of their "originator;" indeed, the demand became so great that the committee for the revision of the Pharmacopeia of 1900, in its paternal effort to rescue the general practitioner from the "patent-medicine" prescribing habit, inserted an official preparation, which the physician could prescribe "ethically." Then a peculiar thing happened: instead of prescribing the official preparation, the physician continued to prescribe the proprietary, and if the pharmacist attempted to serve the official preparation in such circumstances the physician promptly cried "substitution," much to the pharmacist's discomfort. A natural consequence was that the official preparation was neglected, and now to all intents and purposes has ceased to exist. Instead of accomplishing their much-desired and worthy end, this committee therefore merely afforded additional advertising ammunition to the exploiters of these nostrums, who now boast that the U. S. Pharmacopeia—which incidentally Dr. Schelenz calls "an aristocrat among all the pharmacopeias"—advises the use of their preparations in the treatment of diseases, and that all these pastes are regarded as sufficiently worthy to be classed with such well-recognized and time-honored remedies as opium, quinin, arsenic, iron and mercury.

1. Multa renascentur, quæ iam cecidere, cadentque, quæ nunc sunt in honore.

2. Die Geschichte der Pharmacie, Julius Springer, Berlin.

The widespread use of this preparation by physicians furthermore has resulted in an unforeseen and to the general practitioner disagreeable consequence, namely, that the layman has introduced these pastes into his own pharmacopeia to a surprising extent.

A few experiences with these preparations have not endeared them to me nor encouraged me in their use. One of my first observations was in the case of a child, suffering from bronchopneumonia, whom I found encased in a heavy layer of one of the best known of these western muds, and in whom the already seriously impaired respiration was further embarrassed by the weight of the clay poultice. Furthermore, the pores of the skin were closed and the paste interfered with the free access of air to the body, an important principle in the treatment of any disease, particularly in fever. I have also seen the same preparation applied to corns, bunions, ingrowing toenails, typhoid fever, spinal meningitis, miliary tuberculosis, varicose veins, rheumatism, appendicitis, swollen testicles and even to open wounds and ulcers. The clay paste covers a multitude of complaints. I have seen it cause severe irritation due to its most active principle, glycerin.

There is no valid reason whatever for the use of these clay preparations; the U. S. Pharmacopeia contains a sufficient number of counterirritants and rubefacients that are in every way superior to them. There is no need for a clay paste and no necessity for canonizing such a preparation by making the formula official.

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